
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 485

AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITED PERMITTING FOR PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT SITES IDENTIFIED BY MUNICIPALITIES.

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes a process for municipalities to obtain the expedited review of state permit applications needed to develop municipally designated “priority development sites” (PDS). A municipality may propose for such a review sites that it owns and zones for commercial and industrial use and submit them to the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) commissioner for approval based on the bill’s criteria.

If the commissioner approves a site, DECD must provide for the expedited review of any state permits a proposed project needs to develop that site. Under current law, DECD’s Office of Permit Ombudsman coordinates expedited permit reviews of economic development projects with the Transportation, Public Health, and Energy and Environmental Protection departments. A project qualifies for this review when it meets specified criteria, not based on its site’s characteristics.

Under the bill, the commissioner must adopt implementing regulations that, at a minimum, establish (1) additional criteria for approving proposed PDS and (2) the review and approval process. In adopting these regulations, she may limit the number of approved PDSs statewide and in a municipality.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2014

DESIGNATION PROCESS

Proposing PDSs

The bill allows municipalities to propose municipally owned sites

zoned for commercial or industrial use for designation as PDSs by submitting an application to the commissioner that, at a minimum, describes a proposed site's:

1. geographic location;
2. distance to roads, sewers, and electrical service; and
3. environmental condition.

The application must also describe how the site's development could affect the municipality's property tax base and finances, as well as the region's finances. The application must also include any other information the commissioner requires.

Approving Proposed PDSs

The bill specifies how the commissioner must evaluate a proposed PDS when deciding whether to approve it. She must evaluate the site's environmental condition; determine if the site is suitable for development; and analyze how its development could affect the municipality, the region, and the state. In doing so, she must consider the types of businesses and industry that could operate at the site, specific plans to develop the site, and any commitments to do so.

EXPEDITED PERMITTING OF PDS PROJECTS

If the commissioner approves a PDS designation, DECD's Office of Permit Ombudsman must expedite certain state permits a project needs to develop the site. Under current law, the office must do this for projects meeting specific criteria (see BACKGROUND).

By law, the office must arrange for expedited reviews under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Transportation, Public Health, and Energy and Environment Protection departments. Among other things, the MOU must allow the departments to consolidate proceedings and hearings that are otherwise held separately.

BACKGROUND

Project Eligibility Criteria for Expedited Permit Reviews

Under current law, DECD's Permit Ombudsman Office provides for the expedited review of projects meeting one of two sets of economic development criteria. It must do so for projects:

1. creating at least 50 permanent, full-time equivalent non-construction jobs in any of the state's 17 enterprise zones or at least 100 such jobs elsewhere in Connecticut;
2. cleaning up and developing abandoned or underused property;
3. that are compatible with the state's responsible growth initiative;
4. developing a mix of different but compatible uses near transportation facilities and infrastructure ("transit-oriented development"); or
5. developing green technology businesses.

The office must review other types of projects the commissioner approves based on the following economic impact factors:

1. a project's proposed wage and skill levels compared to those in the surrounding area,
2. the extent to which the project will diversify and strengthen the local and state economy,
3. the project's total capital investment, and
4. the extent to which the project complements the municipality's and the state's strategic economic development priorities, as determined by the commissioner in consultation with the transportation, public health, and energy and environmental protection commissioners.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Commerce Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 17 Nay 0 (03/20/2014)